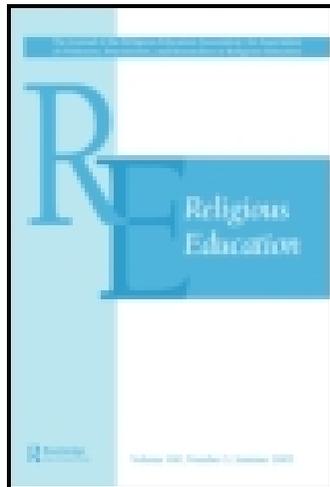


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THE GARY PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND THE CHURCHES*

WILLIAM M. WIRT, M. A.

Superintendent of Schools, Gary, Indiana

I do not know how it has happened, but I find that a great many people imagine that in Gary we are teaching religion in the schools, that we have preachers and priests come into the school and teach religion, that we have made a connection between school and the church. I think it is just the reverse.

I remember a few years ago the pastors of Gary invited me down to a ministers' conference and said they had some fault to find with the schools. They said that in our schools, where the children were in school from eight o'clock till five, the schools were so attractive that it was difficult to get the children interested in the churches. I said that I did not believe it, that we were turning over to the church a better type of child. We were teaching children to play orchestral instruments, so that the Sunday school could have an orchestra; we were teaching them dramatics, so that the child could go into beautiful dramas in the church entertainments, and that I thought the children would do better work than ever before.

Some of them said that was true, if I would let them have my teachers to organize orchestras and dramatics. We keep our schools open on Saturdays, and we pay our teachers for doing Saturday work. But I do not believe that a teacher ought to teach six days a week, and then work on Sunday, too. If she works on Sunday, she cannot work on Saturday. That is why some of the pastors say that I will not let my teachers teach in the Sunday school, for they cannot teach on Saturday if they do.

Some of those pastors had been discussing these things more or less for sometime. A Jewish church had established a school and raised the question as to why they had to take their children so late in the afternoon. The children could go to private music teachers and do many other things on way to and from school and they didn't see why they could not stop at the synagogue for religious instruction in same way. I didn't see any reason why they should not. This time belongs to the parent and he may do what he likes with it.

They can have the children for sixty or eighty minutes before and after school, morning, noon and afternoon. All they need to do

*The first part of Mr. Wirt's address was a detailed account of the plan of school organization and program peculiar to the Gary public schools; the second is stenographically reported here.

is to employ the teachers and give the religious instruction in their own churches entirely separate and distinct from the school. In some of the churches they employ teachers. In some others the pastors take the children and ask the people not to make any appointments for them on Tuesday or Wednesday, or at religious instruction time.

The pastors tell me that in a great many of these churches they have enrolled from thirty to forty per cent more children in their week-day religious schools than they ever enrolled in their Sunday schools. The percentage of attendance is as good in the week-day church schools as in the public schools.

There are a great many difficulties. I do not see, however, why all of these difficulties cannot be ironed out. But I find some principals who want all their children to do the same thing at the same time in the same way. I find other principals who are not very clear about having the parents excuse the children for the religious school work.

I believe that the schools are for the children, and I believe that the strong men and women of this country are ready to do their best to solve this problem of making the city the very best place in the world for rearing children. We are going to get a pure life for our children in the cities just as we have pure water for our homes, and good transportation and good sidewalks. And just as soon as you get wholesome environment, you don't need to worry about what kind of men and women the children are going to become.

After Mr. Wirt's address, an opportunity was given for questions. Some of these and Mr. Wirt's replies follow:

Question: Are the children made more or less efficient for their public school work because of their church work?

MR. WIRT:—I think that the week-day religious work of the child is reflected in the life of the child in public school. I do not think there is any question that when you substitute a normal church life for the children in place of this idling in the streets, you are going to have a better attitude toward life on the part of the child. And while these church schools have not been running more than two years in Gary, I am sure it is not difficult to check up the difference in the life of the children.

Another thing: I believe that in Gary it is rather a difficult thing to find boys smoking. Very few boys smoke. We have never had any campaign against smoking in the schools, but we have kept these boys busy at manual training or at play. Our physical training

teachers do not smoke, and they are fine athletes on the playground. And so they get to be great heroes for the boys, and naturally when these boys admire them so much, they get to imitate them, and so they do not smoke, even though their own fathers at home smoke.

And I believe that the same thing is true with regard to the religious teachers. The personality of the religious teacher is a good thing for the life of the boys. You can bring the boys and girls into contact with better teachers in the week-day religious school than you can in the Sunday school. And the boys make a study of these leaders, and every teacher, I believe, moulds the character of the child by her life and her attitude before them, as much as she does by what she teaches.

Now, I do not say that there are no Sunday school teachers with personality. You will find many who will say that the Sunday school teacher got them started right in life; but I do not believe that the Sunday school alone can do the job of religious education of children. We have tried it a long time, but are not getting a fourth of the children now. How long is it going to take to get all of them into the Sunday school at this rate? And how long is it going to take to get these fine teachers in the Sunday school, in sufficient numbers to do the work? Would it not be better to get a few of them and let them impress their life upon children every day in the week?

If the church is going to be an agency in our lives to teach us how to live, it should begin with the children, and if we spend more time with the children, we would not have to spend so much time with the grown-ups. And I think that if we were to check up, we would find that the influence upon the child would be greatly in favor of the instruction of the child, as compared with the instruction of the adult.

Question: Is the principal in the day school in any way responsible for the enrollment in the religious school?

MR. WIRT:—The day school principal is not responsible at all. The minister and the religious teacher must present a request to the parent as to when they wish the child to come. The parent must indicate on this card whether he wishes the child to come to school late in mornings, leave early for luncheon, come to school late after luncheon or leave early in the afternoon. We do not care what time that request covers. We feel that when we have had the child for five hours, the rest of the time belongs to the parent. We will take care of the child, however, if the parent desires us to do so. But if the parent wants him, he can do what the parent wishes.

He can go to the library, to the church, to home, anywhere. In a great many instances the parent will state on this card that he wants the child to come home, or to practice music, or go to the church. But in no way is the school directing the children into these churches. That would be a vital connection between them.

Question: Does it amount to anything then that the religious instruction is taken out of the play periods?

MR. WIRT:—It amounts to something in this way: In the ordinary school between 9 and 3 you would have your regular official school program. Now the child might go to the public playground, or the music teacher, or the library between 3 and 4. What I want to do is to balance the load of child welfare activities upon all of our child welfare agencies. The municipal playground in Gary is always near to the public school and is used all day long. In that way the child would be missing an outside activity when he misses his play period, and so would be merely exchanging one outside activity for another.

Question: Are religious teachers paid in Gary?

MR. WIRT:—Two of them receive \$1800, one \$1200 and one \$900, and the others who teach only part of the time receive small amounts.*

Question: May they just have a brief spell of instruction, or do you insist upon any number of minutes?

MR. WIRT:—We insist in Gary upon a six hour day for our children, because our schools are running from 8:15 to 4:15 for the children. But in other cities where they have only a five-hour school day, it is sufficient. No child can miss the two eighty-minute periods of book work, or the eighty-minutes special, and we don't let the child do anything else in those periods. All the extra activities are added to the five hour total.

The Gary schools are not schools where the child runs around and does whatever he pleases. The parent must take one of the four set programs, and they are all just as full as the usual 9 to 3 hour program.

Question: Do you check up on the children what they do?

MR. WIRT:—We do not care particularly where these children go, whether they go to the church regularly or not. That is the business of the church and the parent. In the ordinary school, 9 to 3, the children can stay on the playground for an hour, or go to the public library, or go to their homes, or if the parents request it, stop off at the church school, though the public school does not

*See statistics in RELIGIOUS EDUCATION for Feb. 1916, Vol. XI, 1., pages 14-19.

count that at all, and does not check up the time of the child when under the discipline of the home. We give them the choice of the four programs, and we are not responsible for that time extra, any more than the ordinary school would be for the hour from 3 to 4.

Question: Having chosen one of those four programs, does the pupil stick to it, or could the program be changed in the middle of the term?

MR. WIRT:—Well, that would depend. We would give the parent the privilege of doing it, if it would not interfere with the child in the school. You could do it almost any time without interfering with the program of the child in a large school. But in a small school you could not make that shift without interfering with the child's program. The more children you have together, the more you can do with them.

I think that whenever in a small school you have your children promoted from one grade to another, you must make re-adjustments in your church school. There is this situation: With only one teacher, the church would like to have its first and second grade at the same time, also its third and fourth, fifth and sixth, and seventh and eighth. But if the church had two teachers so that they could take older children and smaller children at the same time, it would be much simpler.

Nearly all of the churches have accepted this opportunity, but they have only a small number of children. So that if some of their children were promoted in school, they would possibly have to shift their class in church. But there is nothing that would be unreasonable on the part of the church in making the shift of these children.

REV. J. M. AVANN:—I want to say some words especially with regard to the Gary church schools, and I want you to distinguish very clearly in your minds between the Gary church schools and Mr. Wirt's system of public education. There is absolutely no organic connection between them. The public school has nothing whatever to do with the church school. The church school is absolutely independent of the public school. This movement did not originate with the school men, it originated with the church men. The men of the church saw an opportunity and they grasped it. As it now is, we simply avail ourselves of the long recess which is found in the Gary system of public schools.

The Gary system consists simply of this, that there are two schools in each school building. One school is in an hour, and out an hour, and another school takes its place. So the schools are out for one half of their time. It is just the same as the half-time

system you hear of, except that the public school makes provision for the pupil when he is not actually in the academic studies, through its manual training and its play period, and it is by seizing some of these periods and bringing the children into the church schools that we are able to do something with the children.

I want to say two things: theory or no theory, the children have attended the church school as well as they have attended the public school; and secondly, while only fifteen per cent out of the Sunday school have come into the church, practically all in the church week-day school have come into our church. In our church we received all the children who were over eleven years of age into church membership, except in a few instances where the parents thought they were too young. And the children have come into the church with better qualifications than those who had been received prior to the organization of the church week-day school, and who did not have such training.

ATTITUDE OF THE JEWS TOWARD WEEK-DAY RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

J. L. MAGNES, PH.D.

Chairman of the Jewish Community, New York, N. Y.

The overwhelming majority of Jews in the United States are committed to two fundamental principles in the education of their children: first, that their children attend the public schools; and, second, that they have week-day religious instruction.

The problem before them is, therefore, how to develop a system of religious instruction that shall be supplementary to the public school education, and that shall be adequate at the same time from the point of view of Judaism.

Week-day religious instruction is as old as the Jewish people itself. Wherever the Jews are located, they have week-day religious schools. In this country they have been conducting week-day religious schools for more than two hundred and fifty years. In many places the secular education, as well as the Jewish instruction of Jewish children was, up to fifty years ago, conducted under the auspices of Jewish religious organizations, as, for example, in Cincinnati, New York, Chicago. But with the growth of the public school system, the Jews have committed themselves almost as a body to the proposition that secular education should be received in secular